



IDEAS OF CHANGE IN THE WRITING OF KEATS

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VERA ORIENE EDDS

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FOR THE

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ENTITLED Ideas of Change in the
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Ideas of Change in the Writing of Keats.

I.

Summary of Critical Opinion.

"In our time Keats has come by his own. There is no need to insist on what is universally recognized, that he stands in first rank of the English poets" (1) Many critics have written to present varying shades and degrees of Keats's lasting influence, which has won for him this rank. Perhaps the first favorable opinion which came to be accepted was expressed by Shelley in Adonais:

"He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
, Spreading itself where e'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own."

However, Shelley doubted, as we find from a letter written to his publishers, whether Keats would ever be so recognized. Time has proved him worthy of such a place and more. As a poet of truth and beauty, of grace, loveliness, and of sensuous appeal, his power has been so felt that he had been termed "poet of the poets". His sensuous qualities are no longer challenged. The poetic influence of this charm has not been over-valued, I think; but it has been reasserted so often, and from so many angles to throw new light on the old truth, that the question arises whether we are aware of "the something more and something better" (2)

(1) J. W. Mackail: Lectures on Poetry. P 281.

(2) Matthew Arnold: Essays in Criticism. Second Series. P 120.

• *Journal of politics and government*

• *Journal of politics and government* is a quarterly journal of political science and political philosophy. It is published by the Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley, and is edited by John C. Green, Robert E. Goodwin, and Robert H. Gaskins. The journal is devoted to the study of politics and government, and is intended to provide a forum for the discussion of political theory and practice. The journal is also intended to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and information between scholars and practitioners of politics and government.

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which the poet has for us. Critics seem now to agree that his "expression has that rounded perfection and felicity of loveliness of which Shakespeare is the great master" (2) But the fact that Keats has another Shakespearian quality, that he has "fine passages of life wisdom" (3) is not so generally accepted.

That the germ of intellectual interests was beginning to develop in Keats's character is not doubted. Arlo Bates says, that "had he lived he would have developed a high appreciation of that beauty which is purely intellectual" (4) and that "his limitation lies in the fact that he did not rise in his poetry to the acute perception of that intellectual and spiritual beauty which at once embraces and transcends the delight of the senses."

(4) So in things intellectual, this would lead us to believe, he was only a poet of high promise.

On the other hand J. W. Mackail, in his Lectures on Poetry, claims for Keats prescient insight and profound thought; not as qualities demanding proof, but rather as being essential elements in his discussion of the progress of Keats's poetry. Even William Rossetti, whose life of Keats is censured by Sidney Colvin as being too icily unjust, asserts: "Apart from his own special capability for poetry Keats had a mind both active and capacious. The depth, pregnancy and incisiveness of many of the remarks in his letters, glancing along a considerable range of subject matter, are highly noticeable. If some one were to take the pains of extracting and classifying them, he would do a good service to

(2) Matthew Arnold: Essays in Criticism, Second Series, p 120.

(3) Sidney Colvin: John Keats: His Life and Poetry, His Friends, Critics, and After-Fame. p 266.

(4) Poems by John Keats. Edited with introduction and notes by Arlo Bates.

readers." (5)

In Sidney Colvin's recent work a number of passages from Keats's letters are quoted to illustrate that the poet's thirst for knowledge was more than a passing mood. Concerning these passages, Herbert Vaughn Abbott writes: "Sir Sidney seems to make more than in his younger days of Keats's groping after philosophies not fully his own. There were times of depression in the young poet's passionate and mercurial career when his instincts wavered, his workmanship weakened, and he lost his faith in the glorious self-sufficiency of youth. In the reflections of these despondent moods Sir Sidney sees some promise of future profundity. Perhaps he is right. But they certainly never appear when the poet's hand is sure and his purpose clear."(6)

It is true that Keats was gradually losing faith in the self-sufficiency of youth. The loss of such faith was a step in advance. It put him in a place to make a true valuation of life's experiences. The above criticism implies that statement, which prove that Keats realized the insufficiency of youth were the result of depressed feelings, expressed when his purpose was not clear. Let us consult another critic on this point.

One of the most commonly quoted passages from Keats is that from his letters which begin, "I know nothing, I have read nothing." Matthew Arnold, whose judgment of English literature has the reputation of being sound, says about this: "But indeed nothing is

(5) William Michael Rossetti: Life of John Keats 1887. p 150.

(6) Herbert Vaughan Abbott: Sidney Colvin's New Life of Keats.

more remarkable in Keats than his clear-sightedness, his lucidity; and lucidity is in itself akin to character and to high severe work. In spite, therefore, of his overpowering feeling for beauty, in spite of his sensuousness, in spite of his facility, in spite of his gift of expression, Keats could say resolutely: 'I know nothing, I have read nothing; and I mean to follow Solomon's directions: "Get learning, get understanding." There is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study and thought. I will pursue it.' " (7)

This decision to apply himself to study was given by Keats in a letter to a friend as the one reason for renouncing a proposed pleasure trip for the summer. It was not uttered in a mood of despondency; but it was rather a fixed purpose to which the poet held himself.

So although Keats has been given high rank as an English poet, the quality of his thoughtful appeal is still a matter of dispute among his critics.

(7) Matthew Arnold: Essays in Criticism. Second Series. P. 113.

II.

Keats's Conception of Knowledge.

Four of Keats's critics, William Rossetti, Matthew Arnold, J. W. Mackail, and Sidney Colvin have thus recognized his intellectual qualities. Yet it is true that Keats's poems are so filled with the fine excesses of beauty in which a poet lover might delight to revel, that many of the profound thoughts, simply expressed, might pass unnoticed. We can understand the intellectual scope of Keats best, by bringing together passages selected from his writings and thus let the poet speak for himself. In answer to the over quoted statement, "O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts," Sidney Colvin defines some of the terms which have become distorted in interpretation by the way in which they have been lifted out of their context: "Let it never be forgotten that 'sensations' contrasted with 'thoughts' mean for Keats not pleasures and experiences of the senses as opposed to those of the mind, but direct intuitions of the imagination as opposed to deliberate processes of understanding; and that by philosophy he does not mean metaphysics but knowledge and fruits of reading generally."(1)

With the acceptance of Keats as a poet of thoughtfulness comes the recognition of his solid greatness. In letters which he wrote to friends, he expresses his idea of the character of knowledge. From the same passages we can see that he felt the universal need of knowledge. "I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for

(1) Sidney Colvin: John Keats. p 266.

philosophy. Were I calculated for the former I should be glad, but as I am not I shall turn all my soul to the latter" (2)

"An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people - it takes away the heat and fever; and helps by widening speculation to ease the Burden of Mystery, a thing of which I am beginning to understand a little." (3)

"There is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study, and thought. I will pursue it." (4)

Knowledge then is a thing to be pursued, the attainment of which comes only gradually. The first essential is to make one's mind receptive to the gradual charge which knowledge brings about: "The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing, to let the mind be a thorough fare for all thoughts". (5)

"Nothing is finer for the purpose of great productions than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers." (6)

It has been said that Keats expressed himself objectively. That is true, and by so doing, he has left us an abundance of similes whereby we are able to read new meaning in his simple expressions of thought. The growth of knowledge within man's life

(2) P. 190.

(3) P. 192.

All letter quotations are indicated by page number from The Letters and Poems of John Keats, edited by John Gilmer Speed.

(4) P. 190.

(5) P. 105.

(6) P. 11.

time, he compares to the progression of seasons within the year.

Four seasons fill the measure of the year;

There are four seasons in the mind of man:

He has his lusty spring, when fancy clear

Takes in all beauty with an easy span:

He has his summer, when luxuriously

Springs honied cud of youthful thought he loves

To ruminante, and by such dreaming nigh

His nearest unto heaven: quiet coves

His soul has in its autumn, when his wings

He furleth close, contented so to look

On mists in idleness - to let fair things

Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.

He has his winter too of pale misfeature

Or else he would forego his mortal nature. (7)

"Memory is not knowledge" he writes to Reynolds and then to explain how knowledge can not be static; but must be ever-changing, he compares it first to the weaving of a spider, and then to the growth of a forest:

"Now it appears to me that almost any man may, like the spider, spin from his own inwards his own airy citadel. The points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine web of his soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean - full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wanderings, of distinctness for his luxury. But the minds of mortals

are so different, bent on such diverse journeys, that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste to exist between two or three under these suppositions. Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points, and at last greet each other at the journey's end. An old man and a child would talk together, and the child be left thinking. Man should not dispute or assert, but whisper results to his neighbor, and thus by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from the mould ethereal, every human (being) might become great, and humanity, instead of being a wide heath of furze and briars, with here and there a remote oak or pine, would become a grand democracy of forest trees!" (8)

In this passage Keats might be misleading for he uses expressions concerning the "soul" and "spirit" interchangeably with "mind." Perhaps this is because he was so intent upon convincing his friend that he believed knowledge to be a living, changing thing. In the same letter Keats says that the greatest honor can not be paid a writer by the fact that he lives in man's consciousness, that he is remembered; but that the passive existence of his works has caused to arise "the spirit and pulse of good." (8) In the passage quoted above there is an attempt not only to symbolize the process of thought, in the individual but also the complexities which come in social knowledge. Another simile used by Keats to present the idea of intellectual growth has been more often referred to - the simile of the Chambers of Thought: "I will put down a simile of human life as far as I now perceive it; that is, to the point to

which I say we both have arrived at, Well, I compare human life to a large mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first step we call the Infant, or Thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long time, and notwithstanding the doors of the second chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it, but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere. We see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there forever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man, of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness, and apprehension; whereby this Chamber of Maiden-Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time on all sides of it, many doors are set open - but all dark - all leading to dark passages. We can not see the balance of good and evil; we are in a mist, we are in that state, we feel the 'Burden of the Mystery' ".(9)

From this point the writer goes on to express his judgement concerning the knowledge of Wordsworth and of Milton at the time of their greatest productions. To dwell upon the quality of these judgments would be apart from the purpose of this discussion. In summing up this long simile of life, Keats says: "What is then to be inferred? O! Many things: it proves there is really a grand (9) P. 196.

march of intellect; it proves that a mighty providence subdues the mightiest minds to the service of the time being, whether it be in human knowledge or religion." (10)

"There is really a grand march of intellect."

Herein Keats defines concisely his underlying principle of philosophy - that all life is changing, progressing, which is made possible through intellect. If man can play his part in the grand march consciously, then we are approaching the ideal harmony of human living together. But whether man wills or no, the element of change goes on. Up to this point the quotations have been selected to show that Keats recognized that knowledge is fundamental to growth; but more than that, that he saw knowledge to be living, changing, dynamic in itself.

By this I do not mean to imply that he ceased to use his gift of intuitive imagination. He knew that he could not stop with that, and if he grew weary at times, as all artists must, in disciplining himself to greater achievements, that is no sign that he was despondent to the degree of giving up his purpose.

Even in a letter written by Haydon, who it has been asserted by Arnold, did not appreciate Keats's strength of character, we read: "At first I feared your ardor might lead you to disregard the accumulated wisdom of the ages in moral points, but feelings put forth lately have delighted my soul."

In writing to his friend Rice, Keats expresses the impossibility of remaining content and settled in our thoughts, the impossibility of drawing the check rein on the progress of ideas:

(10) P. 198..

"What a happy thing it would be if we could settle our thought and make our minds up on any matter in five minutes, and remain content; that is, build a sort of mental cottage of feelings, quiet and pleasant; - to have a sort of philosophical back-garden, and cheerful holiday - keeping front one. But, alas! this never can be; for as the material cottager knows there are such places as France and Italy, and the Andes, and burning mountains, so the spiritual cottager has knowledge of the terra semi-in-cognita of things unearthly, and cannot for his life keep in the check rein." (11)

The significant fact is that however much Keats might have enjoyed throwing himself into a settled life of pleasantness, he realized the long struggle in onward and upward development of the intellect, and he realized it to the extent that he struggled with "flint and iron" (12) in his nature to play his part in the "grand march." To circumscribe this growth so that it may furnish substance only for the phrasing of verses in poetry would be to limit the power of poetry itself. It is true Keats said: "The best sort of poetry is all I care for, all I live for." The best poetry interprets life, and only in so far as a poet is interested in life can he be able to write "the best sort of poetry." In regard to this Keats writes to his friend Reynolds: "Were I to study physic, or rather medicine again, I feel it (11) P. 181.

(12) Matthew Arnold: Essays in Criticism, Second Series. P. 112.

would not make the least difference in my poetry; when the mind is in its infancy a bias is in reality a bias, but when we have acquired more strength, a bias becomes no bias. Every department of knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole. I am so convinced of this that I am glad at not having given away my medical books, which I shall again look over, to keep alive the little I know thitherwards; and moreover intend, through you and Rice to become a sort of pip-civilian. The difference of high sensations, with and without knowledge, appears to me this: in the latter case we are continually falling ten thousand fathoms deep, and being blown up again, without wings, and with all (the) horror of a bare-shouldered creature; in the former case; our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air and space without fear." (13)

Knowledge, Keats says, is universally needed. It is a thing to be pursued and should be developed gradually. Knowledge not only makes progress possible; but it is in itself a development, upon which we can not draw the check rein. If we should go no farther in our discussion of Keats's ideas, his statements thus far have discovered to us, that he understood knowledge itself to be a changing thing, a process of growth.

(13) P. 192.

III.

Ideas of Change in Shorter Poems and Letters.

Many aspects of change may be found in the letters and shorter poems of Keats. The idea of life with ever changing conditions was so familiar to him that he could draw illustrations in a general way like this: "This is the world; thus we cannot expect to give away many hours to pleasure; circumstances are like clouds, continually gathering and bursting. While we are laughing, the seed of trouble is put into the wide arable land of events, while we are laughing it sprouts and grows and suddenly bears a poisonous fruit which we must pluck. Even so we have leisure to reason on the misfortune: our own touch us too nearly for words" (1)

In a letter to his brother he brings in the simple old Greek conception of the body being "fresh materialed" every seventh year: "From the time you left me our friends say I have altered completely - am not the same person. Perhaps in this letter I am, for in a letter one takes up one's existence from the time we last met. I dare say you have altered also - every man does - our bodies every seven years are completely fresh materialed. Seven years ago it was not this hand that clinched itself against Hammond. We are like the relict garments of a saint - the same and not the same, for the careful monks patch it and patch it until there's not a thread of the original garment left, and still they show it for St. Anthony's shirt. This is the reason why men who have been bosom friends on being separated for any number of years, afterwards meet coldly, neither of them knowing why. The fact is they are both altered. Men who live together have a

silent moulding and influencing power over each other. They interassimilate. 'Tis an uneasy thought that in seven years the same hands cannot greet each other again. All this may be obviated by a wilful and dramatic exercise of our minds towards each other". (2)

The aspect of change here conveyed is alteration or mutation. In the sense that much must pass with regret and with loss, change takes on the nature of destruction or decay. In the working of natural forces Keats recognizes this condition.

"I was at home
 And should have been most happy, - but I saw
 Too far into the sea, where every maw
 The greater on the less feeds evermore. -
 But I saw too distinct in the core
 Of an eternal fierce destruction,
 And so from happiness I was far gone,
 Still am I sick of it, and tho today,
 Iv'e gathered young spring-leaves, and flowers gay
 Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,
 Still do I that most fierce destruction see," (3)

Keats grows into a more optomistic attitude toward evolution than is expressed in this "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds," In "Hyperion" he explains the self-destructive stages of change in nature as a part of nature's progress.

Concerning the changes which take place in personal relation-
 (2) P.99.

(3) P. 242; 92-102.

ships Ludolph in "Otho the Great" says:

"The relationship of father and son
Is no more valid than a silken leash
Where lions tug adverse, if love grow not
From interchanged love through many years". (4)

In the, "Ode on Melancholy", the transitiveness of life is again in the background of his thought picture. By placing "veiled Melancholy" in the "Very temple of Delight" he emphasises how subtle and inevitable are the changes in life.

"She dwells with Beauty - Beauty that must die
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh
Turning to poison whild the bee-mouth sips:
Aye, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her vovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's Grape against his palate fine;
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung." (5)

The "Ode to Autumn" is in a different tone, not marked by introspective thought. Keats dwells simply upon the loveliness of in nature of Autumn. Here the idea of change in nature is suggested in the ripening fruits, in the soft-dying day, and in the question "Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, Where are they?" (6)

The stories of romance, the stories of days that have been, held a charm for Keats. He liked to call back in poetry such as "Lamia", "The Eve of St. Agnes", "The Eve of St. Mark", "La Belle

(4) P. 167: 98-102

(5) P. 127

(6) P. 213

Dame sans Merci" and "Robin Hood", the past which had gone, which hand changed to give place for the present.

"No! those days are gone away,
 And their hours are old and gray,
 And their minutes buried all
 Under the down-trodden pall
 Of the leaves of many years:
 Many times have Winter's shears,
 Frozen North, and chilling East,
 Sounded trumpets to the feast
 Of the forest's whispering fleeces,
 Since men knew nor rent nor leases." (7)

The poem, "I Stood Tiptoe Upon a Little Hill," may seem at first only descriptive of nature, but the theme which gives it unity is the effect of the beauties of nature upon man.

"Linger awhile upon some bending planks,
 That lean against a stremlet's rushy banks,
 And wathc intently Nature's doings

 ----- the hurrying freshnesses aye preach
 A natural sermon" (8)

Out of the beauty of nature man learns lessons of beauty and truth applicable to life. The attempt to reveal such thoughts has resulted in the stories of Phyche and Love, Syrinx and Pan, Narcessus, and Endymion. In a little digression Keats expresses his desire to reveal some such truth through the stroy of Endymion. Finally, the poet says, out of the thoughts derived from nature comes the awakening of human sympathy. The idea of change here is one of development. Thoughts, which have their source in the

(7) P. 41

(8) P. 15: 60-70

sensuous delights of nature, are brought to bear on human nature, and finally there results a deeper understanding and sympathy for mankind.

In dealing with poetry Keats gives us ideas concerning life. " 'The best sort of poetry - that', he truly says, 'is all I care for, all I live for' ".(9) The best sort of poetry interprets life and in the poem, "Sleep and Poetry," Keats's attitude toward life is both asserted and symbolically expressed. Poetry is ranked above sleep, and above the beauties of nature.

"It has a glory, and nought else can share it
 The thought thereof is awful, sweet, and holy,
 Chasing away all worldliness and folly;
 Coming sometimes like fearful claps of thunder,
 Or the low rumblings earth's regions under;
 And sometimes like a gentle whispering
 Of all the secrets of some wondrous thing." (10)

Poetry will bring "a fair vision of all places,"
 "Also imaginings will hover round my fireside, and haply
 there discover vistas of solemn beauty." (11)

From nature's loveliness the poet can learn lessons for
 human life::

"And fearful from its loveliness,
 Write on my tablets all that was permitted,
 All that was for our human senses fitted
 Then the events of this wide world I'd seize
 Like a strong giant." (12)

(9) Matthew Arnold: Essays in Criticism, Second Series. P. 112

{10} P. 18:23-30

{11} P. 19:71-73 (12) P. 19:77-82.

But the length of time in which this wisdom may be gained from nature is short. Life is everchanging.

"Stop and consider! Life is but a day.

A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way

From a tree's summit -----

----- Why so sad a moan?

Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;

The reading of an ever changing tale". (13)

Keats expresses a desire that he may have more time to devote to the mysteries of this "ever changing tale" through the voice of poetry. The manner of development in poetry, which is the development of the power to see things as they are, is described in the next division of the poem (96-161) as having practically the same steps as the growth in understanding through the influence of nature's beauties in the poem, " I stood Tiptoe Upon a Little Hill". To read the ever changing tale of life the poet must have a wide vision.

"Then will I pass the countries that I see

In long perspective, and continually

Taste their pure fountains." (14)

Passing the realm of Flora and Pan typifies the awakening of the senses to the loveliness of nature. Then follows a knowledge of the beauty of human life.

"A lovely tale of human life we'll read." (15)

The development of the sul's perception leads the poet into deeper truths of life.

"And can I ever bid these joys farewell?

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
 Where I may find the agonies, the strife
 Of human hearts." (16)

The idea of change is one of growth. From an appreciation of nature the poet grows to an appreciation of life, and finally, to a stronger understanding, and sympathy for human struggle.

Then to express this idea of change, or development of the poetic soul, more clearly, he gives a simile of a charioteer driving through the heavens. Poetry, in its more sublime and lofty aspect, is able to perceive a clear understanding of life with all its complexities, and conflicting motives.

"Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear
 Passing along a dusky space
 Made, by some mighty oaks: as they would chase
 Some ever fleeting music on they sweep,
 Lo! how they murmur, laugh; and smile, and weep:
 Some with unholden hand and mouth severe,
 Some with their faces muffled to the ear
 Between their arms; some, clear in youthful bloom,
 Go glad and smiling athwart the gloom
 Some looking back, and some with upward gaze;
 Yes, thousands in a thousand different ways
 Flit onward." (17)

While thus the chariots sweeps above the onward procession of humanity,

(16) P. 19: 122-125.

(17) P. 20: 137-148.

"Most awfully intent the

The driver of those steeds is forward bent,
And seems to listen" (18)

As the charicteer watches humanity and listens to the hum of life he writes upon a tablet. The charicteer represents the poetic soul in its search for an understanding of life. The car may be the flight of imagination, or the power of penetrating the mists ahead. As the poet records the lessons of life he gains keen unsight into the truth. The tablet may signify the accumulated wisdom of ages, and the principles of understanding, on it may signify this knowledge embodied in the expression of poetry. The development of poetic insight, as it is described in the poem, "Sleep and Poetry," is a gradual change finding a souch in the loveliness of nature and of human nature and growing stronger as the poet is able to perceive the "balance of good and evil" in the perplexities of ever-changing human life.

Keats saw the principle of change operating in his own poetical development. In imagination, he perceived the germ of truth to be later attained. In writing to his friend Taylor about a revision of "Endymion", he says that the whole thing must have appeared:

"As a thing almost of mere words. But I assure you that when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the imagination toward a truth." (19)

Again, he explains:

"My having written that argument will perhaps be of the greatest service to me of anything I ever did. It sets before me

(18) P. 20:151-153

(19) P. 171

the gradations of happiness, even like a kind of pleasure thermometer and is my first step toward the chief attempt in the drama: the playing of the different natures with joy and sorrow." (20)

Each task completed is of service to Keats as a foundation for the undertaking of one larger. There are gradations in the expression of truth, even as there are gradations of happiness. In Endymion he says he is pioneering, and that he is eager to complete it in order that he may proceed.

Beauty, the truth of life, is the constant goal of his efforts. His productions are the variables. Yet as he is steadily exalted by the genius which is above his grasp, there comes a re-perception of what is fine; so that even truth is forever changing as he is able to perceive a standard more nearly perfection.

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(20) P. 171.

Truth, Keats spoke of interchangeably with beauty. "His yearning passion for the beautiful was an intellectual and spiritual passion. It is connected and made one with the ambition of the intellect."

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all

Ye know on earth and all ye need to know."

Keats was a great spirit, and counts for far more than many of his admirers suppose, because this just and high appreciation made itself clear to him". (21)

The depth and pregnancy of this conclusion is better understood by reading the preceding stanzas of the ode in which we find the line of thought which prompted it. In the second stanza, the poet feels the contrast between the figures on the urn and life in reality. The various sculptured forms symbolize life with its composite activities arrested for the moment. The truth comes to him in a realization of the impossibility of prolonging any moment of life in its intensity.

"The second and third stanzas express with full felicity and insight the differences between life, which pays for its unique prerogative of reality by satiety and decay, and art, which in forfeiting reality gains in exchange permanence of beauty." (22)

Life is an ever changing tale, (23) says Keats. In real life we can only struggle toward beauty, struggle to penetrate the mists about us with truth. In real life such beauty and harmony as we can see between conflicting passions and forces must be "seized" by the imagination as truth, and tested by the knowledge

(21) Matthew Arnold Essays in Criticism, Second Series. P 115.

(22) Sidney Colvin: Life of Keats. P. 417.

(23) Sleep and Poetry. P. 91.

which comes through experience.

"Then let winged Fancy wander
Through the thought still spread beyond her
Open wide the mind's cage door.

Let then winged Fancy find
Thee a mistress to thy mind." (24)

The development of the ability to see the truth of life is a development of the intellect. The gradual conception of truth is the "grand march of the intellect." (25)

The song of the nightingale suggested to Keats the same constancy of truth as did the Grecian urn.

"the nightingale doth sing
Not a senseless tranced thing
But divine melodious truth
Philosophic numbers smooth;
Tales and golden histories
Of heaven and its mysteries." (26)

The changing nature of life is felt in contrast to the ever present spirit of the bird's song.

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home

She stood in tears among the alien corn." (27)

(24) P. 124.

(25) P. 198.

(26) P. 125.

(27) P. 145.

In a study of the shorter poems and letters, we find change expressed in different aspects. It may be only alteration, or mutation. Destruction or decay, as a form of negative growth, is often discovered to be a stepping stone in progress. In the poem, "I Stood Tiptoe upon a Little Hill" the poet reveals how lessons may be learned from nature which may be applied to human nature, and will bring about a richer sympathy for human life. In "Sleep and Poetry," life is described as "the reading of an ever changing tale". The poet's soul develops through the growth of a deeper understanding of the mysteries of the world, and a keener sympathy for its struggles. Through the changing conditions of life, as expressed in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the intellect is sharpened to a clearer perception of truth. In this gradual conception of truth lies the "grand march of the human intellect." (28).

(28) P. 198.

Change Expressed in "Endymion" and "Hyperion."

No better expression of the idea of change, as an underlying philosophical principle of life, can be found than in the two long poems of Keats, "Endymion" and "Hyperion." In each the allegorical interpretation plays the important part. The first presents the struggle of the soul for beauty; the second takes a grander, more comprehensive theme in the change from one world order to another.

In the first lines of "Endymion" the theme of the poem is introduced and the suggestion of the struggle and its causes are given:

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep.
Full of sweet dreams, and health and quiet breathing.
Therefore on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of the unhealthy and o'er darkened ways
Made for our searching! yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits." (1)

In the poem this "shape of beauty" is the moon-goddess, Cynthia, who represents the essential spirit of beauty. Endymion, the young shepherd prince, symbolizes the soul, while his sister Peona may be said to introduce the human element. It is Peona who urges her brother to be content again with pleasures as he had (1) P. 49: 1-13.

been before his dream vision, and to take up again his old ambitions. At the beginning of the poem the young shepherd is taking no part in the religious festivities, but is rather sitting apart, listening to some of the older shepherds as they,

"discours'd upon the fragile bar
That keeps us from our homes ethereal
And what our duties there." (2)

Keats had not yet come to the fine perception of the relation of beauty to the intellect. Yet it is significant, I think, that it is while talking with these sages, that the shepherd experiences again the vision of "fellowship with the divine". In answer to his sisters pleading to again take up his former pleasures, he says:

"Peona! ever have I long'd to slake
My thirst for the worle's prises; nothing base,
No merely slumberous phantasm, could unlace
The stubborn canvas for my voyage prepared -
Though now 'tis tatter'd; leaving my bark bar'd
And sullen drifting: yet my higher hope
Is of too wide, too rainbow - large a scope,
To threat a myriads of earthly wrecks,
Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks.
Our ready minds to fellowship devine." (3)

From the first the purpose to search for its essential beauty is clear enough for Endymion, representing the soul, to answer his sister with determination.

(2) P. 54: 359-362.

(3) P. 60 : 768-778.

"No, no, I'm sure
 My restless spirit never could endure
 To brood so long upon one luxury,
 Unless it did, though fearfully, espy
 A hope beyond the shadow of a dream." (4)

In the next three books are presented the details of the soul's struggle for beauty. The incidents of Endymion's wanderings told at great length are well summarized by Robert Bridges and by Sidney Colvin. However, they differ in the allegorical interpretation of these events, which take place on earth, under the earth, and through the air. But it is clear that the changing experiences are for the soul a struggle. Sidney Colvin recognizes two sub-motives in the presentation of these details:

"One was that the soul enamoured of and pursuing Beauty cannot achieve its quest in selfishness and isolation, but to succeed must first be taken out of itself and purified by active sympathy with the lives and sufferings of others: the other, that a passion for the manifold separate and individual beauties of things and beings upon earth is in its nature identical with the passion for that transcendental and essential Beauty." (5)

In his letters Keats places a high value upon experience. He also said:

" I am convinced that apparently small causes make great alterations". (6)

This not only shows that he recognized apparently small causes but that he valued the incidental. It should be noted that

(4) P. 61: 853-857.

(5) Sidney Colvin: John Keats. P. 172.

(6) P. 89.

although Endymion passes through many of these incidental experiences, yet he is continually unable to recognize the goddess though she comes to him again. Yet from this pursuit the soul has grown in its conception of beauty:

"And now; thought he,
 How long must I remain in jeopardy
 Of blank amazements that amaze no more?
 Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core
 All other depths are shallow: essences;
 Once spiritual, are like muddy lees,
 Meant but to fertilize my earthly root,
 And make my branches lift a golden fruit
 Into the bloom of heaven: other light,
 Though it be quick and sharp enough to blight
 The Olympian eagle's vision, is dark,
 Dark as the parentage of chaos. Hark!
 My silent thoughts are echoing from these shells;
 Or are they but the ghosts, the dying swells
 Of noises far away?" (7)

Two incidents in the story bring about an unselfish attitude on the part of Endymion. After he forgets his own selfish quest in love and prays for Arethusa there is a clearer light across his path and his experiences on earth are completed. The second incident which calls forth unselfishness is his meeting with Glancus, the old seaman who has been stationed for years to watch for some one to perform the simple ritual, which will restore disappointed lovers to each other. Endymion again brings (7) P. 77: 900-914.

the selfish quest of his own love to a halt to give this service. In return Glancas presents him with a shell whose mystery he is able to interpret.

"Beauty-in other words the spirit of the Poet - must prepare itself for its high calling, first by purging away the selfishness of its private passion in sympathy with human loves and sorrows, and next by acquiring a full store alike of human experience and of philosophic thought and wisdom." (8)

After long searching for the moon-goddess his quest not only becomes less selfish, but really becomes less of a motive. He finds that he can love the Indian maiden. He chides himself inwardly, and then finally resolves to renounce his first high aspirations for the beauty of human life. The soul after long searching for spiritual beauty, after learning the lessons of unselfishness and, after gaining the knowledge through experience, is willing to accept something less perfect than divine beauty. Here again, Peona comes in with her pleadings, saying to the Indian maiden: "Tell me, my lady-queen, how to espouse

This wayward brother to his rightful joys!" (9)

But although Endymion renounces his search for the moon-goddess he will not accept the mortal love of the Indian Maiden. He was near then to his first goal - divine fellowship, yet still unable to grasp it, for he was unable to see the relationship between the imperfect beauty and the perfect. As he leaves the two maidens, going into the forest, where he expects to live as a

(8) Sidney Colvin: John Keats. P. 194.

(9) P. 106: 841-843.

hermit in the Dian's temple, he muses thus over his long experiences:

"I did wed

Myself to things of light from infancy;
 And thus to be cast out, thus born to die
 Is sure enough to make a mortal man
 Grow impious. So inwardly he began
 On things for which no wording can be found;
 Deeper and deeper sinking, until drown'd
 Beyond the reach of music: for the choir
 Of Cynthia he heard not, though rough bier
 Nor muffling thicket interposed to dull
 The vesper hymn, for swollen, soft and full." (10)

The young shepherd-prince thrilled with passion for the moon goddess, and once selfish in his quest, now goes along his way unselfish, so deep in thought that he is not aware of the music of Cynthia's choir. Thought now predominates over emotion; the change in the soul's struggle has been so complete, that it is now capable of perceiving beauty in its divine and perfect state.

Such long struggle was necessary, says the goddess:

"Drear, drear
 Has our delaying been; but foolish fear
 Withheld me first; and then decrees of fate;
 And then 'twas fit that from this mortal state
 Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlooked-for change
 Be spiritualized." (11)

(10)P. 108: 957-967.

(11) P. 109: 988-993.

The incongruity, the inharmony of his sincere love for both the Indian Maiden and the moon-goddess, Cynthia, had bewildered Endymion, but now they are revealed to be one and the same person. Now the soul sees the truth, that the zealous search for human beauty, and for divine beauty are essentially identical, varying only in the degree of perfection. In the attainment of either there is a long change, which is made progress through the conscious struggle to see this true harmony, which is essential beauty. The "Unlooked-for change" was a recognition that in human relationship, which Endymion was selfishly casting aside, was the germ of divine fellowship for which he was striving. In the knowledge of this fact was the "unlooked-for change" accomplished. In this allegorical presentation of changing life comes a fuller realization of the principle. "Truth is beauty, beauty truth." (12) To be sure the final realization is revealed by the goddess; but it comes not until, through many changing conditions and circumstances of life, Endymion has experienced for himself the balance between true and untrue perceptions. The revelation by the goddess may be considered, more over, symbolical of truth dawning upon the consciousness of the soul. From this allegorical presentation Keats's philosophical ideas of change are made evident - that life is a struggle in changing experiences, and that through knowledge progress is possible.

"Aye, when the soul is fled
Too high above our head
Affrighted do we gaze

(12) P. 134.

After its airy maze,
As doth a mother wild
When her young infant child
Is in an eagle's claws
And is not this the cause
Of madness? - God of Song,
Thou bearest me along
Through sights I scarce can bear:
O let me, let me share
With the hot lyre and thee,
The staid Philosophy." (13)

(13) P. 242.

In "Hyperion" and in "Hyperion: A Vision" is another allegorical presentation of the principle of change operating in a scope of wider power and more impressive significance. The underlying meaning of these fragments is more definitely stated, more clearly portrayed than that of "Endymion", so that although they were mere not completed, critics have recognized them as the most potential productions of Keats. Of the allegory in "Hyperion" Robert Bridges writes: "One passage, the speech of Oceanus in Bk ii fairly supplies the argument, which is that there is a self-destructive progress in Nature towards good, and that beauty, and not force, is the law of this flux or change." (14)

Sidney Colvin speaks thus: "Clearly the essential meaning of the story was for him symbolical; it meant the dethronement of an older and ruder worship by one more advanced and humane, in which ideas of ethics and of arts held a larger place beside ideas of nature and her brute powers. Into this story the poet plunges, not even in the middle but near the close." (15)

When Keats opens the story, the Gods of Olympus have been victorious over all of the Titan dynasty except Hyperion. The supreme power of Saturn has already been assumed by that "infant-thunderer Jove". The first description is of Thea weeping at the feet of the sleeping Saturn:

"O aching time! O moments big as years!
All as ye pass swell out the monstrous truth,
And press it so upon our weary griefs
That unbelief has not a space to breathe." (16)

(14) Poems of John Keats: Edited by G. Thorn Drury with an introduction by Robert Bridges. P. I.
(15) Sidney Colvin John Keats. P. 427.
(16) P. 200: 64-68.

The monstrous truth is that the power of the Titans has vanished. Upon awakening Saturn questions the cause of his distress.

"who had power

To make me desolate? Whence came the strength?
 How was it nurtured to such bursting forth,
 While Fate seemed strangled in my nervous grasp?"
 But it is so; and I am smother'd up,
 And buried from all god like exercise
 Of influence benign on planets pale
 Of admonitions to the winds and seas.
 Of peaceful sway above man's harvesting,
 And all those acts which Deity supreme
 Doth ease its heart of love in." (17)

While Saturn and Thea go back through the darkened forest, Hyperion is pictured still holding sway, yet unsecure, for

"Sometimes eagle's wings
 Unseen before by Gods on wondering man,
 Darken'd the palace." (18)

When Hyperion comes upon the threshold of the west, he challenges the shadowy spirits there,

"Come to domineer,
 Insult, and blind, and stifle up my pomp." (19)

In answer only a mist arises before him, and an agony weakens his physical strength. He hastens back to the east, and seeks to sway all at his word.

(17) P. 200: 102-112

(18) P. 201: 182-184

(19) P. 202 : 245

"Fain would he have commanded, fain took throne
 And bid the day begin, if but for change.
 He might not:- No, though a primeval God:
 The sacred seasons might not be disturbed." (20)

At this, Coelus, the voice of space, speaks:

"Now I behold in you fear, hope, and wrath;
 Actions of rage and passion; even as
 I see them on the mortal world beneath,
 In men who die.- This is grief, O Son!
 Sad sign of ruin, sudden dismay, and fall!
 Yet do thou strive; -----
 ----- - Be thou therefore in the van
 Of circumstance; yea seize the arrow's barb
 Before the tense string murmur-To the earth." (21)

On earth, Hyperion finds the gods in council, despondent and incapable of organizing their strength. Not in the legends of the first days, not in the spirit-leaved book saved by Uranus from the shores of darkness, not through searching Nature's universal scroll, has Saturn been able to find the reason

"why ye Divinities
 The first-born of all shap'd and palpable Gods,
 Should cower beneath what, in comparison,
 Is untremendous might." (22)

Oceanus answers:

(20) P. 203: 289-293.

(21) P. 204: 336-345

(22) P. 206: 152-155

"For this reason, that thou art King,
And only blind from sheer supremacy.
One avenue was shaded from thine eyes,
Through which I wandered to eternal truth
And first, as thou wast not the first of powers
So thou art not the last; it cannot be:
Thou art not beginning nor the end.
From chaos and parental darkness came
Light, the first fruits of that intestine broil
That sullen ferment, which for wondrous ends
Was ripening in itself. The ripe hour came,
And with it light, and light, engendering
Upon its producer, forthwith touched
The whole enormous matter into life
Upon that very hour our parentage,
The Heavens and the Earth were manifest
Then thou first born, and we the giant race
Found ourselves ruling new and beauteous realms.
Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain;
O folly! for to bear all naked truths,
And to envisage circumstance, all calm,
That is the top of sovereignty. Mark well!
As Heaven and Earth are fairer, fairer far
Than chaos and blank Darkness, though once chiefs;
And as we show beyond that Heaven and Earth
In form and shape compact and beautiful
In will, in action free, companion ship,
And thousand other signs of purer life;

So on our heel a fresh perfection treads

Receive the truth and let it be your balm." (23)

In this speech two ideas of change are expressed, the progress of intellect, and evolution according to natural law. The overthrow of the Titans is an evidence of the displacement of one conception of truth, by a new understanding which is nearerer perfection. Of this intellectual growth more is said in the third book of "Hyperion" and in "Hyperion A Vision". The second idea is evolution in the physical world.

Oceanus says that Saturn is blinded from sheer supremacy. The Olympians are not in reality the force under which the Titans are cowering, for their might "in comparison is untremendous". It is not because an Olympian god is asserting his power against the will of Hyperion, that the day did not begin at his command. It was because

"The sacred seasons might not be disturbed." (24)

The Titans were losing power because they were placing their supremacy against forces of eternal truth, such forces as make change and progress in evitable. The shadowy forms upon the threshold of the west, the strange eagles whose wings darken the light of Hyperion, the approach of steeds not heard before are symbolical representations of these forces natural to the world, but not recognized before by the Titans. Oceanus describes stages in the course of natural evolution as changing from chaos and darkness to light, the touching of the whole enormous matter into life, and finally, the "manifestation of Heaven and Earth" (25)

(23) P. 207: 184-212.

(24) P. 203: 293.

(25) P. 207: 198.

After explaining that the rule of the Titans was neither the beginning nor the end, but a stage in advancement, Oceanus proclaims that the top of sovereignty is "to bear all naked truths." By "envisaging circumstances", by coming into an intellectual perception of the true relationships of life, a new standard of perfection comes into sway. In turn a power more strong in beauty, which is truth, excels.

"So on our heels a new perfection treads,
 A power more strong in beauty born of us
 And fated to excel us, as we pass
 In glory that old Darkness; nor are we
 Thereby more conquered, than by us the rule
 Of shapless chaos." (26)

From this we gain that Keats believed there are gradations of intellect as there are gradations of happiness, the more nearly perfect truth advancing always upon the gain made by that less perfect which preceeded.

In the third book of "Hyperion" this advance of intellect is symbolically expressed by the young god, Apollo, gaining knowledge from Mnemosyne, memory. Apollo had dreamed of her, and on awakening found beside him a golden lyre, a symbol of his heritage from the preceding Titanic rulers. It may seem that the young god is a weak character, yet he shows strength in his inquiring, intellectual attitude toward progress:

"I strive to search wherefore I am so sad

Goddess benign, point forth some unknown thing:
 Are there not other regions than this isle?

What are the stars?" (27)

Then gazing upon the sky, the god exclaims upon the wonder of these stars, of the sun, and of the moon. He asks, "Where is power?" but the goddess is silent.

"Mute thou remainest - Mute! yet I can read
 A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
 Knowledge enormous makes a God of me
 Names, deeds, gray-legends, dire events, rebellious,
 Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
 Creations and destroyings, all at once
 Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
 And defy me, as if some blithe wine
 Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk
 And so become immortal." (28)

But with the attainment of knowledge by Apollo the poem is left uncompleted.

In the reconstruction of this theme in "Hyperion: A Vision", the narrative is told as experiences which come in a poet's vision-dream. There is added, then, to the idea of evolution in nature, and the growth of intellect, the introductory theme of poetic development. The poet's first experience is to find before him a feast of summer fruits, representing the simple sensuous delights. After drinking from a cool vessel of transparent juice he falls into a slumber, and upon awakening he is within an old sanctuary - the temple of knowledge. Black gates "shut

(27) P. 211: 88;97.

(28) P. 211: 111-120.

out the eastern sunrise evermore". To the west afar off an immense image can be seen, and at its feet, an altar. Long ranges of steps on either side lead to the altar. The goddess ministering at this shrine has the combined personality of Mnemosyne, Greek goddess of memory, and Moneta, the Roman goddess of admonition. (29) She invites the poet to mount the steps, threatening death if the gummed leaves, which she is sacrificing, be burned before he reaches the altar. The pavement before the steps fills the poet with a death like chill and numbness. It seems impossible to even reach the first step, yet as he places his foot there is a new life in his veins. When the poet asks the goddess to purge off the film from his mind, she answers:

"None can usurp this height
 But those to whom the miseries of the world
 Are misery, and will not let them rest.
 All else who find a haven in the world,
 Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days
 If by a chance into this fane they come,
 Rot on the pavement." (30)

Overcome by sensuous delights the poet had been brought into the temple of knowledge. Here he saw the gummed leaves, the years of his life being burned away. Change was for him inevitable; there must be either progress or destruction. With a struggle he takes the first step toward knowledge and gains new life. Only by seeking, continually seeking the true conception of life, can

(29) Sidney Colvin: John Keats. P. 447.

(30) P.235: 146-153.

the poet advance. Nor can he keep his sensuous delights, without seeing the misery of the world, because there is destruction for all those "who thoughtless sleep away their days." Happiness the poet can not keep alone, but his growth must come through sharing it with others:

"Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shared,
Such things as thou art are admitted oft
Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile
And suffer'd in these temples: for that cause
Thou standest safe beneath this statues knees." (31)

Thus the poet learns that his development must come through a larger human sympathy, and through the continual striving for wisdom and knowledge. From the goddess, the poet learns, as did Apollo in the first construction of the poem, the knowledge of all former change. The story of the fallen house of Saturn before the "infant thunderer Jove" (32) is practically the same as has already been interpreted through the speech of Oceanus. In both presentations the symbolism shows change to be inevitable. It may be only mutation, such as is typified by the wan face behind the curtain,

"bright-blanch'd
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathward progressing
To no death". (33)

Change, operating in nature through self-destruction of former perfection, becomes progress. In human life, change may be a pro-

(31) P. 235: 177-181.

(32) P. 202: 249.

(33) P. 253: 230-231.

cess of degeneration, such as the goddess describes for those who "rot on the pavement", or it may be development, as in the case of those who strive unselfishly in harmony with natural law toward a higher state of perfection.

Conclusion.

As a poet of truth and beauty, of felicity in expression, and of sensuous appeal Keats has been ranked among the first of English poets. There is a difference in critical opinion in regard to his qualities of thought.

Keats believed knowledge to be of fundamental importance. On extensive knowledge was essential to thinking people. Intellectual pursuits should be constant, for knowledge is in itself growing and changing. Keats held a fundamental principle of thought which was definite, but not binding. He saw in life the principle of change.

Keats's ideas of change are both asserted, and embodied in the theme of his writings. Often they are expressed objectively in similes. In *Endymion* and *Hyperion* change, in its aspects of development, although symbolically presented is made the theme of the poems.

Keats recognizes change in a general way as alteration, or mutation. His main interest is in change as a development. Change in the form of negative growth, may appear as destruction or decay when in reality it is only a stage of progress. Keats distinguishes two aspects of development in life, which tend to blend one with the other, the development of human sympathy, and the development of the intellect. Since the former is made possible only through the latter, sympathy for humanity coming only as a result of a deeper understanding, then the fundamental conception of change which Keats held is that, "there is really a grand march of human intellect."

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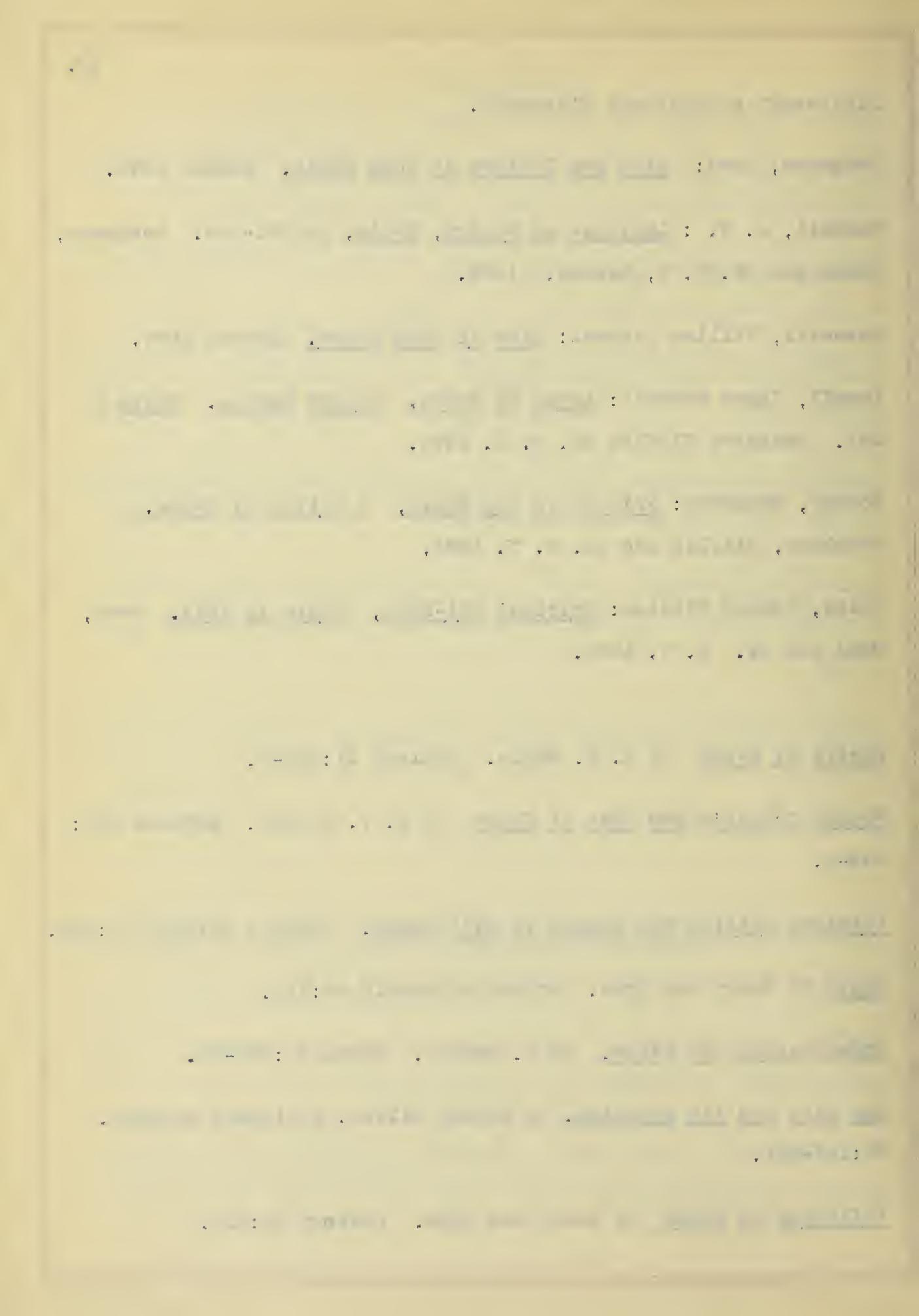
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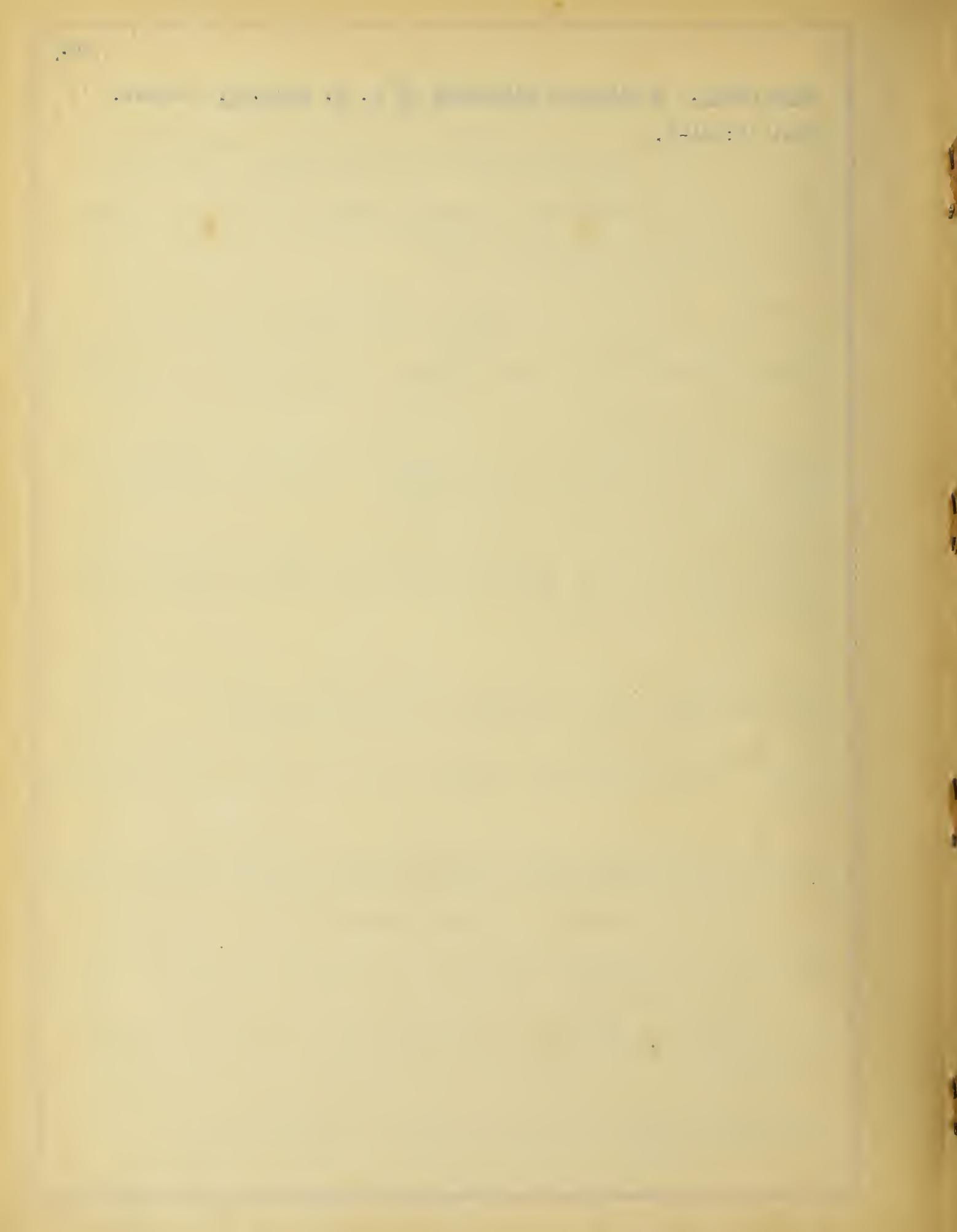
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